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ABSTRACT

As employers increase the use of teams and telecommuting in the workplace, the need for improved communication also accelerates both in written and oral modes. For oral communication or public speaking, a review of recent literature indicates this renewed emphasis, with numerous articles highlighting the need coming from disciplines ranging from accounting to science. Additionally, more and more people are incorporating technology into their presentations, breaking the limitations of projectors, screens, and flipcharts. This paper addresses the need for faculty from all disciplines to learn how to help students develop their speaking skills. To do this, the paper presents a communication model that identifies the elements of the process, then uses this model (The Rhetorical Process Model of Communication) to outline a 5-step process. Specifically, the paper addresses the following topics: (1) Background--Clarify who you are; (2) Preparation--Determine what you want to do; (3) Method--Determine how you want to do it; (4) Delivery--Present the speech with confidence; and (5) Feedback--Follow up to ensure success. (Contains a Best Practices Summary Table and a 13-item bibliography.) (NKA)

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Student Public Speaking — Creating the Confidence

Breaking Through Barriers

by

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Student Public Speaking — Creating the Confidence

Breaking Through Barriers

"If I can't see it, I don't understand it."
-Albert Einstein

The rise of the information age has intensified the need for improved communication. As employers increase the use of teams and telecommuting in the workplace, the need for improved communication also accelerates both in written and oral modes. For oral communication or public speaking, a review of recent literature indicates this renewed emphasis, with numerous articles highlighting the need coming from disciplines ranging from accounting to science, as well as such specialized subgroups as Black educators. Additionally, more and more people are incorporating technology into their presentations, breaking the limitations of projectors, screens, and flipcharts.

Educators must meet this need in new and creative ways. Typically, a professor will focus on his or her academic discipline, leaving the training in public speaking to its own primary department such as communication, English, or rhetoric. Such an assumption ignores two significant points: not all students will take a speech course; and students need to practice public speaking skills in multiple venues. This paper addresses the need for faculty from all disciplines to recognize the need and to learn how to help students develops their speaking skills. To do this, we will present a communication model that identifies the elements of the process, then use this model to outline a five-step process. Specifically, the paper will address the following topics:

The Rhetorical Process Model of Communication
Step 1. Background — Clarify who you are
Step 2. Preparation — Determine what you want to do
Step 3. Method — Determine how you want to do it
Step 4. Delivery — Present the speech with confidence
Step 5. Feedback — Follow up to ensure success
Summary Table of Best Practices

The Rhetorical Process Model

Our approach to oral communication follows the elements described in the Rhetorical Process Model of Communication (presented in the attached Figure 1). This model considers communication from a systems perspective (input ➞ integration ➞ output); however, it divides the process in two ways. Fist, human communication consists of two tracks, objective and subjective. Additionally, the integration section of purpose and method also divides into two parts. For any communciation process, the purpose consists of both the specific intentions the

speaker wishes to achieve and the specific audience that the speaker wishes to address. The method also consists of the genre or type of communication, as well as the process used to develop and sequence the ideas. In this model, the output consists not only of the output speech itself, but also of its interpretation, which may vary among the different listeners. Ultimately, the feedback loop enables the speaker to verify whether the actual message received matches the speaker's intentions. The steps in oral communication described below follow the elements of this model (Beck, Managerial Communication, p. xx).

Step 1. Clarify Who You Are

Most people do not like to speak in public. Speaking apprehension typically ranks quite high among the common fears people have, and our students are no exceptions. Given this starting point, professors must help students realize three crucial points:

> Students have significant abilities that are undeveloped.
> Students have knowledge about many subjects.
> Nervousness is **NORMAL.**

As they strive to impart new knowledge and skills, professors must reinforce what students already know. But even more importantly, they must impart the realization that nervousness in public speaking is absolutely normal. Even those who have taught for years must face apprehension in a new setting and with new students. Professors can even reinforce this sense of nervousness by drawing attention to major award ceremonies such as the Oscars for movies and the Emmy Awards for TV. At these ceremonies, even those, whose occupation is public performance, exhibit major nervousness in addressing an audience of their peers. Nervousness is "normal." But the secret for public speaking is to realize that

> The fact that nervousness is normal does not mean
> that nervousness must take control.

In reinforcing student abilities, professors must give more opportunities to speak, even in limited ways. Students can expect to be called on and to answer questions — a public speaking opportunity even if they do not leave their seats. They must face frequent opportunities to practice and reinforce their skills — and see such opportunities as typical and normal. Students must come to acknowledge that they indeed have skills and that they actually can speak in public, even if they would prefer not to. If professors require students to demonstrate their knowledge, the professors are setting minimum performance standards which they expect students to meet. And most often, when professors set high standards, students will meet those standards.

Professor Reinforcement	Student Learning
Give opportunities to demonstrate abilities	Recognize my inherent abilities
	Believe in my background abilities
Reinforce those abilities	Know my position within the group
Allow continuous practice	Realize that nervousness is normal
Provide an open environment	Recognize environment as open
Reinforce that we want to hear	Predict that others are receptive
Assume confidence in the student	Become self-confident in abilities

Step 2. Determine What You Want to Do

Once students are clear about themselves, they are ready for public speaking. Public speaking begins with a key determination --- what do I want to do and to whom am I speaking? Professors need to provide students with multiple opportunities to try public speaking. Such opportunities range may begin with the rather simple requirement to having students stand, identify themselves, and then answer a question before the entire class. Going further, students may present to the entire class an issue or position discussed within a small group. Finally, students may give an extended oral report on an individual or group project. By setting the expectations, training the students, and allowing them opportunity to practice, professors in every discipline can help improve student presentation skills.

Professor Reinforcement	Student Learning
Identify outcomes of learning	Analyze the audience; determine the point I want that audience to get to
Determine the performance standards	Know my classmates and what they expect
Identify opportunities for practice	Recognize how to become comfortable with the audience
Clarify scope, level and depth	Identify with each audience
What level of proficiency	Determine proficiency of audience
Determine level of subject knowledge for class proficiency	Understand the class content; be able
Determine the essential occupational knowledge level	Become comfortable with knowledge proficiency

Step 3. Determine How You Want to Do It

After speakers know themselves, their audience, and their subject matter, they can begin to determine the method of presentation. This aspect is central to the entire speaking process, but it builds on the prior steps. The method includes two dimensions, genre and process. Method and process both recognize that individuals in the audience will process information differently, so the speaker tries to meet multiple needs. For example, "Left-brainers like handouts, definitions, and outlines: right-brainers like visuals to demonstrate a concept" (Weaver, *Computers in Libraries* 19:4 [Apr, 1999] 62.) Additionally, individuals may process information visually, auditorially, or kinesthetically, so multiple approaches help meet the dominant learning styles of the audience.

Multimedia

For types of approaches, obviously we are considering an oral presentation rather than a written document. However, professors must be open to multiple ways to provide oral reinforcement and practice. If professors provide opportunities for public speaking, students gradually become more comfortable and see speaking as "normal":

Brainstorming sessions	Buzz groups
Case histories	Debates
Demonstration	Forums
Interview	Lecture
Panels	Problem solving groups
Project presentations	Report presentations
Structured review	Role playing
Symposiums	Testimonies

Within the overall structure of a class, professors can widen their perspective to include a wide range of opportunities for practice in oral presentation.

General Guidelines

To be effective, however, oral presentations must also integrate appropriate visual reinforcement. As Julie Hill indicates, "the American attention span isn't what it used to be, and the competition for people's hearts, minds and time has never been fiercer" (*Presentations*, Apr 2000, p. 38). The audience is accustomed to sound bites and brief presentations, so the speaker must reinforce information with visuals to re-direct their attention. Visuals must be designed for impact — few words on each visual reinforcing one main idea. Table 1 provides general guidelines for use of visuals.

TABLE 1: General Guides for Visuals

- Keep visuals simple — too much detail confuses and distracts.
- Adapt visuals from books, magazines, web sites, and clip art — remove portions not relevant for your audience or your emphasis.
- Use sharp, primary colors for contrast — pastels and yellow wash out to gray when projected in a large room.
- Use minimal words and short labels — too many words counteract the effect gained by visual reinforcement.
- If you need a complex visual — build toward it by presenting smaller parts, then showing how the pieces fit together.

ADAPTED FROM Charles E. Beck, *Managerial Communication*, (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1999), p. 92.

In general, professors need to recognize the need for variety in the design of visuals, rather than monotony. An overall design template rigidly followed becomes boring, or as Emerson put it, "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds."

Specific Media Guides

Aside from the general guidelines, professors must be open to a wide range of visual types. The structure of a classroom may dictate the dominant media, such as white board, overhead projector, or computer-generated slides. The following list provides some alternative visual media for professors to consider:

Chalkboard/whiteboard	Clip Art
Electronic Library	Flip charts
Maps	Newspapers and Magazines
Overhead transparencies	PowerPoint projections
Storyboards	Tangible objects

The presenter must determine the correct type of visual to convey the type of information.

If your Information Involves..,	***Consider Using ....***
Straight text	Bullet points
Trend	Line graph or area graph
Relationship	Pie chart or line graph
Comparing quantities	Bar graph
Categories, activities	Tables or charts
Process flow	Diagram

After selecting the type of visual, the presenter must follow guidelines, such as those shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2: Guides to Specific Types of Visuals

Lists	Follow the rule of sixes — NO MORE THAN 6 words per line 6 lines per slide 6 "word" slides in a row
Photographs	Use simple photos with labels to highlight information. Photos may confuse — they usually contain more than the speaker wants to deal with.
Drawings	Use simple schematics for visual emphasis. Schematics emphasize concepts or equipment better than photographs. Simple schematics serve as visuals; complicated diagrams belong in a handout or report appendix.
Tables	Use simple tables for comparison or contrast. Complex tables present data rather than illustrate key points, so keep complex tables for handouts, simple tables for visuals
Graphs	Use graphs to visualize relationships among data. Simplify the graphs for visuals, with few items compared on the same graph. Place exact scientific plots in a handout or report appendix; use simplified graphs for visual reinforcement.

ADAPTED FROM Charles E. Beck, *Managerial Communication*, (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1999), p. 93.

The speaker must be alert to the size of the room and the projection capability. Whether the speaker is using a flip chart or projecting an image on a screen through transparencies or PowerPoint, the viewing principles remain the same. The farther the viewer is from the projected image, the larger the lettering must appear, using the following relationship:

Minimum Letter Size	Maximum Viewing Distance
1/4 inch	8 feet
½ inch	~ 16 feet
1 inch	32 feet
2 inched	64 feet

The best concepts on a screen are meaningless if the viewer cannot see them. The style of the font must create the maximum impact.

Use no more than 3 font styles in a presentation
Limit the USE OF ALL CAPS — THEY ARE HARD TO READ
Limit use of **boldface** and ***italics*** — they distract
Use a font size that can be seen (usually 24; no smaller than 18)
Use large fonts for headlines — 35-45
Use sans serif fonts (Helvetica) for better projection

ADAPTED FROM Presenters University Web site

Technology Enhancement

Our students have been conditioned by television and refined through the MTV culture, so they expect visual excitement. Such excitement comes from reinforcing the content of a presentation with sight and sound — graphics and music. By daring to be different, the professor can relate information by pushing the theme to the edge while avoiding the obvious danger of going over the edge. In other words, the speaker tries to reinforce but not replace the key ideas. Computer-generated graphics provide an easy way to achieve reinforcement: PowerPoint backgrounds may be downloaded from the Internet. Many can even be downloaded from the Internet, whether individual content on a specific topic or just backgrounds for PowerPoint. Computers connected to projectors, overhead screens, or smart boards are becoming more commonplace as a way to meet audience expectations. Ultimately, however, the professor must ensure that the purpose and audience come first — PowerPoint is not an end in itself but a means to help the speaker achieve a specific purpose.

Process and Flow

The process involves the wording for the sequence of ideas, word choice, types of examples. The speaker must prepare for multiple repetitions to reinforce concepts, including previews, presentations, and reviews. The speaker may be presenting an abstract concept, but needs to bring it to life with examples, metaphors, and analogies. The amount of variety in approaches will appeal to the multiple learning styles in the audience.

Ways to explain concepts:

Main Techniques	Examples from the subject area Metaphors/analogies from outside the subject area Operational definitions of specific terms
Additional Techniques	Further definition of complex words Etymology of words derived from other languages Past history with the concept or idea Basic principles Cause and effect Physical Description Simplify by dividing into parts Mnemonic devices

The speaker needs to provide a logical sequence for the ideas while incorporating a variety of wording approaches. Some general reminders for sequence include the following:

An attention getting opener

Content interspersed with anecdotes or humor to reinforce

A closing that sums the ideas and leaves an impact

In particular, the speaker attempts to impart learning in a way that is informative, memorable, and fun. The fun aspect relaxes both speaker and audience, creating a more conducive atmosphere for learning. In preparing for a formal presentation, the speaker should organize main ideas and jot a few notes in outline form. Even for a short response in class, students who organize key ideas will come across as more prepared and credible. The use of notes in speaking is a standard, accepted practice; however, "notes" does not equate to a "full script" for the speech. By preparing for every occasion, students will learn a technique that will adapt to multiple circumstances.

Preparing the ideas for the presentation, however, is insufficient — the speaker must practice the delivery, and practice with an audience improves the final result.

Professor Reinforcement	**Student Learning**
Identify learning approaches	Become comfortable with a variety of learning approaches
Demonstrate multiple visual genres	Become comfortable using multiple visual genres
Reinforce logical approaches to sequence of information	Be able to sequence ideas in logical order for presentation

Step 4. Present with Confidence

The preparation leads up to the main feature, the presentation itself. Here we reinforce the old proverb: "It's not what you say but how you say it that counts!" Here we focus on both the verbal and the nonverbal aspects of the presentation.

Verbal

The speaker must speak loud enough and slow enough so that the entire audience can hear. Loud and slow means enunciation — moving the mouth more than normal in routine conversation, projecting the words to the wider audience. Loud and slow places the speaker in control — it counteracts the normal nervous tendency to speed up; but more importantly, it gives the speaker the mental processing time to form the words and convey the ideas. Someone who speaks too fast will get lost, searching for words and using verbal fillers (uh, um, ok) will reduce effectiveness. The note card serves as a reminder of the key ideas to talk about, and the deliberate slowness gives the speaker time and lets the audience hear more clearly.

Students must practice in advance — which means standing and speaking out loud. They cannot just mentally go over the ideas; rather, they must be comfortable with how they sound when speaking loud and slow

Nonverbal

Nonverbal communication can create visual excitement or distraction. Speakers often forget they themselves are the primary visual for a presentation, so physical appearance is a key starting point.

Nonverbal communication includes five main elements: gestures, eye contact, posture, paralanguage, and facial expressions (James P. T. Fatt, *Communication World* 16:6 (June-July, 1999) 37-40). The audience responds to nonverbal communication in determining overall impression. When the speaker finishes, the audience may not even remember the exact content, but they will remember impressions such as whether they liked or disliked the speaker, whether they judge the speaker as competent or incompetent, and whether they had confidence or no confidence in the recommendations.

The audience will determine credibility of the speaker based on such nonverbal aspects as eye contact, gestures, and posture. Does the speaker "appear" confident or not. The word "appear" is critical. The speaker may be extremely nervous; but if the speaker recognizes the nervousness and decides not to let it take over, the speaker will appear quite confident to the audience. The reason that professors need to give students practice in public speaking is to reinforce this key point — speakers can be nervous yet quite effective at the same time; the two are NOT mutually exclusive.

The paralanguage aspects of public speaking include the dynamics of volume, pitch, and pronunciation. The first words spoken set the tone for the audience — is the speaker confident or not. Again, the idea of slow and loud will set up the audience for a favorable impression.

Professor Reinforcement	Student Learning
Provide continuous opportunities to speak	Stand and speak with confidence
Provide a professional platform	Use simple gestures
Provide a professional environment	Project self and ideas as important
Demonstrate proper techniques by example	Maintain eye contact
Provide immediate feedback	Reinforce presentations with visuals
Ensure adequate equipment availability	Use a pointer judiciously
Let students become tutors	Use minimal notes as reminders
Ask critical thinking questions "What if?"	Speak extemporaneously for maximum effect

Step 5. Follow up to Ensure Success

The process of speaking does not end when the speaker walks away or sits down. The educational process requires feedback from the professor, members of the audience, and the specific student involved. Some feedback should occur immediately, whether through a brief verbal comment, a nod of approval, or a brief comment sheet. Other feedback will occur later, such as individual responses by other class members. The forgotten component comes from the student. Students should be asked to reflect on their speaking performance, to objectively look back, starting with feelings about the experience by progressing to a cognitive analysis. Students can become effective speakers; but the greatest drawback is their own assumptions. By forcing them to examine their performance with feedback and self-analysis, students can change their assumptions about their ability. They may never reduce their sense of nervousness, but they can come to realize that they are effective, despite nervousness.

Professor Reinforcement	Student Learning
Verify performance level	Ask questions to verify audience interpretation
Verify knowledge level and content	Ask someone to paraphrase the learning outcomes
Reinforce the positive highlights	Prepare select audience members for guaranteed feedback
Determine audience reaction and responses	Provide a self-critique of successes and areas of improvement
Present individualized overall performance	
Provide opportunity for self critique	

Conclusion

Professors face a continual dilemma — how to develop professional speaking skills in students. They may take the approach that such skills come through a communication course or through a communication department, but such an approach passes the buck to someone else. The challenge that educators face involves how to reinforce and expand communication. The best reinforcement comes by integrating oral communication skills into the courses to the extent possible. Educators face the challenge of ensuring that their students leave the skills they need to succeed. They must make students aware that they sell themselves in whatever career they choose. They can do so by giving students the opportunity and the tools, and reinforcing their ability.

Public speaking combines the ideas and presentation, the verbal and the visual. Ultimately, the speaker is the main visual for the presentation, so the speaker needs to be well groomed and appropriately dressed for the occasion. Extreme fashions or make up, clanky jewelry, or noisy coins in a pocket create distractions.

> "Life in the eyes and a smile on your face are the most important visuals in your presentation" (Anne Miller, "Courses," *WWW. Presentersuniversity.com*, April 27, 2000).

Best Practices Summary Table

	Professor Reinforcement	*Student Learning*
1. Clarify who you are Status and Assumptions		
	Give opportunities to	Recognize my inherent abilities
	Demonstrate abilities	Believe in my background abilities
	Reinforce those abilities	Know my position within the group
	Allow continuous practice	Realize that nervousness is normal
	Provide an open environment	Recognize environment as open
	Reinforce that we want to hear	Predict that others are receptive
	Assume confidence in the student	Become self-confident in abilities
2. Determine what you want to do Purpose (intention and audience)		
	Identify outcomes of learning	Analyze the audience; determine the point I want to that audience to get
	Determine the performance standards	Know my classmates and what they expect
	Identify opportunities for practice	Recognize how to become comfortable with the audience
	Clarify scope, level and depth	Identify with each audience
	What level of proficiency	Determine proficiency of audience
	Determine level of subject knowledge for class proficiency	Understand the class content; be able to restate that knowledge for others
	Determine occupational knowledge level	Become comfortable with knowledge proficiency
3. Determine how you want to do it Method (Genre and Process)		
	Identify learning approaches	Become comfortable with a variety of learning approaches
	Demonstrate multiple visual genres	Become comfortable using multiple visual genres
	Reinforce logical approaches to sequence of information	Be able to sequence ideas in logical order for presentation

4. Present with Confidence

- Provide continuous opportunities to speak
- Provide a professional platform
- Provide a professional environment
- Demonstrate proper techniques by example
- Provide immediate feedback
- Insure adequate equipment availability
- Let students become tutors
- Stand and speak with confidence
- Use simple gestures
- Project self and ideas as important
- Maintain eye contact
- Reinforce presentations with visuals
- Use a pointer judiciously
- Use minimal notes as reminders
- Speak extemporaneously for maximum effect

5. Follow up to Ensure Success

- Verify performance level
- Verify knowledge level and content
- Reinforce the positive highlights
- Determine audience reactions and responses
- Present individualized overall performance
- Provide opportunity for self-critique
- Ask questions to verify audience interpretation
- Ask someone to paraphrase the Learning outcomes
- Prepare select audience members for guaranteed feedback
- Provide a self-critique of successes and areas of improvement

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